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A NIGHT IN THE SIERRA MORENA.

DURING the winter of 1872, we made a trip through Spain, passing the Spanish frontier at Irun, crossing the Pyrenees, scanning Madrid, taking a good look at Seville, and finally undertaking an expedition into the Sierra Morena. The object of our visit into that wild country was to examine its geological formation, with a view to an estimation of the mineral wealth contained therein, and to note also the 'lay' of the country for railway purposes. We undertook the journey in a sort of covered wagonette, drawn by four wretched-looking horses, the party consisting of an aged companion, an interpreter, a driver, and a help, making five in all. The direction of our journey was nearly north, through the province of Huelva, past the villages of Fuenta de Cantos and Guadalcanal, the distance from Seville of the extreme end of our journey being about eighty miles.

Before leaving England, we were assured that it was safer to travel alone in the Sierra Morena than it was to walk alone at night down Whitechapel; that brigands were things of the past, and only existed in imaginations naturally weak and timid; that if we chose, we might take a revolver, but it would be a useless encumbrance, which we should regret having with us; in a word, that there was no danger.

During our stay in Madrid, we made the acquaintance of a young Spanish gentleman, who had passed some years in England, and who spoke English very well; to him we announced our intention of visiting the district north of Seville, and examining the mountain passes of the Sierra Morena.

'What escort do you propose taking?' he asked.
'None, except a couple of revolvers.'

'The place is most dangerous,' said the Spaniard; 'all the deserters, thieves, and rascals about Seville, Cordova, or Cadiz, escape to the Sierra Morena, and live there by thieving and murdering. If you go alone, you will incur a great risk.'

This was the opinion of a Spaniard, who, how-

ever, had never been in the districts in question, whilst our informant in England had visited it.

At Seville we heard two accounts of the mountains and of the safety of travelling there: one was, that you might travel safely anywhere with a walking-stick, and be treated civilly; the other was, that the brigands were in numbers, and that an escort was a necessity.

Reviewing the whole question, we decided that it was probable that brigands did exist, but that with care, watchfulness, and a little diplomacy, a journey might be effected without an escort; and having been accustomed to travel in the wildest of wild countries, namely, Africa, with no protection except that afforded by the weapons we carried, we had considerable confidence in ourselves, and believed we might venture on the expedition.

Leaving Seville at daybreak, we travelled for several hours along the wretched roads that are invariably found in Spain. On these roads, at every ten yards or so, four or five stones are to be seen, double the size of brickbats, over which the driver sends his vehicle with a jolt and a shout. No one seems to consider it necessary to remove these stones, or in any way to improve the road, but all is left very much as other things are left in Spain, to take care of themselves.

On our journey, we met numbers of peasants riding mules, and bringing in large quantities of cork. A mule laden with cork is a curious object; the lightness of the material enables the mule to be almost covered with cork, which is piled up and spread out on each side of the animal. The men who rode or conducted these mules were quite different in appearance from the peasants in the north of Spain. Even now, the Moorish element is visible, especially among the country-people in the south, many of them looking like half-castes; and although, if cleaned and well dressed, they might appear less villainous, they certainly seemed the most cut-throat rascals it has ever been our fate to inspect. These peasants, or gypsies as they were termed by our interpreter, were clothed in broad-brimmed hats of felt; a bluish flannel shirt; a broad red sash, in which was their long knife; scanty

trousers, protected by a sort of leatheren apron, that fitted over each leg, and projected behind, giving a most singular appearance to the men when walking.

At the first resting-place we reached, we had an opportunity of noting the manners in a Spanish *venta* or *posada*, as the inns are termed. A *fonda* in Spain means a first-class hotel, whilst a *venta* is about equal to a public-house. Even the *fondas* in the best cities of Spain are abominable; they are dirty, deficient in many essentials, and invariably smell horribly of garlic and burnt oil. This being the case with a *fonda* in the cities, it may be expected that a *venta* in the mountains is not a very convenient resting-place. Fowls, donkeys, dogs, and human beings seem to live therein in a most friendly way, and we also found that certain small creatures were in legions in the beds.

Thirteen hours' continued jolting over the rough roads of these mountains had thoroughly tired us out, so that the announcement that we had at last reached the inn was an agreeable one to us. On driving into the large gateway by which we entered it, we saw that far to the right, and far to the left, was one long room, the ceiling of which was the rafters and thatch; the walls were white-washed, and the windows were merely square holes without glass, capable of being closed by wooden shutters. On the earthen floor of this room was a fire, around which, on chairs, were seated about twenty ruffianly-looking men. To say that these men were dirty, would be using a mild term to describe their filthy state. It seemed as though their clothes had not been taken off for many months, and as though water, except as a drink, was not considered at all necessary. On our entering the *venta*, and descending from the vehicle, the majority of these ruffians jumped up, and came into very close approximation to us, for the purpose, apparently, of examining us. Such a proceeding was highly objectionable: first, because the odour of these people was unbearable; and secondly, as the hilt of the long knife which each man carried was visible in his belt, we were reminded of the number of crosses by the roadside which we had seen, each indicating a murder, and of the reports we had heard of the readiness with which these men used their weapons. Their curiosity having been satisfied, they again closed round the fire, whilst we made known our pressing want for food, and our request for beds. In answer to our first demand, we were informed that a fowl would be killed for us. In our trustfulness, we did not inspect our dinner in its living state, as we afterwards found was necessary, but allowed the landlady to kill what was, we supposed, from the tenacity with which limbs and joints clung to each other, the senior hen. Fortunately, early during the day we had procured a woodcock, and this bird having been prepared for cooking, would serve for our first course.

Suspended from a beam across the room and over the fire, was a large chain, almost stout enough to have served for the cable of an iron-clad; at the extremity of this chain were three large hooks, similar to those used by the Royal Humane Society for fishing out reckless skaters from the bed of the Serpentine. Very formidable did this apparatus look, and well suited to support half a sheep over the fire; but when at the end of this huge chain our poor little woodcock (cut in halves and spread out) was suspended over the fire, and

watched by twenty ruffians, we felt that so trifling a morsel was quite unworthy of such a formidable surrounding.

Having seen that there was a probability of some part of our dinner being cooked, after a fashion, we devoted our attention to inspecting that part of the establishment intended for our bedrooms. First we found a room, at the end of the long barn-like building, which was about twelve feet square. This was the state-room of the establishment. The floor was of brick, the walls white-washed, the ceiling was the rafters and thatch. Hung on the walls were a number of coloured prints of a Catholic and religious character. The window of this room was a square hole of about two feet each side, and without glass; consequently, if the wind blew, or there was any rain, this opening had to be closed, when the only source of light was cut off. A few chairs and a table completed the furniture of this room. At one side of the state apartment there were two cabins, about eight feet square: these were our bedrooms; but they were at present occupied by some fowls. There was only a doorway, but no door, to these holes, and no window or chimney. From the rafters were suspended long strings of capsicums, and several bunches of musty-looking grapes, and long strings of sausages.

Whilst we were inspecting our rooms, the lady who seemed to rule the *venta* brought us a large brazier containing embers from the fire, and commenced laying the cloth for our dinners. We must give to these people the credit of having clean and white linen for their tables, a result probably due to the fact, that at these *ventas* it is not once in six months that a customer arrives sufficiently civilised to care for a table-cloth. Eagerly did we look forward to 'dinner,' for the air had been cold and bleak all day, and we had been many hours without any food more substantial than biscuits. It was a long time before the woodcock appeared—but at last it was placed before us. There are many delusions and snares in this world, but none, we believe, more certain than the belief that one enjoys anything in the way of food when hungry, no matter how it is cooked. 'Hunger is the best sauce,' says the proverb. Let those who think so, try to dine off half a woodcock and a fowl cooked at a *venta* in the Sierra Morena. The woodcock arrived, and it was divided between the two of us; but its appearance was not prepossessing—part of it was raw, and part burnt to a cinder. Still it was eaten, and we sat in expectation of the next course.

During our performance on the woodcock, the landlord, who was a fat, stupid old man, came into our room, and stood quietly watching us as we ate; he was soon followed by three men, who had left their seats by the fire, evidently for the purpose of seeing how we fed. All four men were smoking cigarettes, an accompaniment not quite agreeable during dinner. The landlady soon joined the group; and we could scarcely avoid feeling as though we were in a cage, being watched by visitors, who had paid a small sum to become sightseers. Mustering our best Spanish, we managed to make the landlord understand that we should like to try a pint of his very best wine, for our stock of brandy was exhausted, and the rascally landlord at Seville had put in our hamper a villainous compound of Spanish brandy, instead of cognac, which we had ordered. The landlord

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returned with his wine, at the same time that the landlady placed on the table a roast fowl. A pint of wine and a roast fowl sounds well; but, alas! practical experience too often reveals the fact, that all is not gold that glitters. We set to work to carve the fowl, which looked miserably gaunt and thin; but though we are somewhat expert at separating joints, yet, after many ineffectual efforts, we entirely failed to amputate the pinion of that ancient hen. Help, however, was at hand, and it came in a manner we little expected. The landlady, with a woman's ready wit, saw our difficulty, and also its remedy. Shouting to her husband, who was quietly watching our struggles, she placed one hand on the fowl's leg, and grasped it firmly, her husband doing the same with the other leg. A long and a strong pull was given by these heavy weights, and the fowl's legs came off. One leg was placed in our plate, the other in our companion's. The wings were then seized by the same parties, and torn off in the same manner as the legs had been; after which the landlady appeared highly pleased, whilst the landlord looked more stolid and stupid than ever.

Not a smile appeared on the faces of the lookers-on; they watched the whole proceeding calmly, and as though it were a matter of course; and they seemed rather to pity us for our want of ingenuity in not having been able to separate legs and wings from body without these allies. It was only after we had endeavoured, during several minutes, to produce with our teeth some impression on the fowl, that we had to give it up as a bad job.

But we have yet our wine with which to make our hearts glad. This wine had been brought in a large tumbler, like that used for a brandy-and-soda. It was rather thick, but probably that defect would not damage its flavour. Cautiously we lifted it to our lips, and tasted it. Alas for the reputation of the wines of the Sierra Morena! This compound tasted as if composed of equal parts of brine, treacle, and vinegar; whilst there was a musty, mildewed twang about it, that rendered it abominable. It was impossible to avoid some expression of disgust at this mixture, and our grimace needed no interpreter: even the stupid landlord comprehended that we did not approve of his best wine; but we had yet much to learn as regards the manners of these rural landlords. Seeing us put down our tumbler, the fat man came round beside us, coolly lifted our tumbler, examined it at the light, took a deep draught, smacked his lips, and then handed the wine to one of the bystanders, who also tasted it, and handed it back to the landlord, who replaced the tumbler, now half empty, and exclaimed: 'Drink it. *Delicioso*' (It is very good). However, we replied: 'No puedo' (No more). One really eatable thing was supplied us, and that was a melon. It was grown in the open air, was very fine, and was really as good a melon as we have ever eaten; but the method of our cutting it was objected to by the hostess, who energetically seized the melon with her somewhat soiled hands, and cut off a slice for us, intimating at the same time that a melon ought to be cut thick, and plenty of the rind cut off. Really, this landlady meant well, and attended to us to the best of her ability: her activity, too, was wonderful, considering that she must have been at least sixty years of age, was about five feet high, and weighed about sixteen stone. When, however,

attentions are carried beyond the dinner-table, and extend to the hours devoted to rest, they become unpleasant. Thus, when we had retired to rest, we could have easily dispensed with the visit of the landlady, who, with arms akimbo, inquired if we wanted more clothes on the bed, and seemed disposed to stand chatting. She was followed, too, by a couple of the smoking ruffians, who seemed very interested in our proceedings. The curiosity of our visitors having apparently been gratified, they left us, and we soon after slept as quietly as though we had dined and drank well, and were not in a wild and dangerous country.

Our next night was passed at the inn of a small village without event; but the third night is one which we shall long remember.

Our third day's journey had been a very protracted one, and darkness had closed in on us before we had reached the solitary venta where it was proposed we should pass the night. Before reaching this house, our interpreter informed us that he did not like the place; it had a bad name, he said, and was frequented by thieves. No other house, however, was within a league, so we had no alternative but to stop at this place, or remain all night in the open. The state of the horses, moreover, rendered it necessary that food and shelter should be obtained. It was near midnight when we reached the long solitary building that was to be our resting-place; and as we drew up outside it, we heard a multitude of voices inside, which became hushed, as if by signal, when we knocked at the door. The door was opened a little way, and some conversation took place between our interpreter and some one behind the door; after which our man informed us we could not enter, as the place was full of brigands. Being certain that our horses could not drag us another mile, we determined to stop, however. The landlord now came and told us that the men inside said we should not enter, as we were strangers, and he advised us not to do so, or he would not be responsible for the results. Taking our interpreter by the arm, we pushed past the landlord, and entered a long, low barn sort of place, at the end of which was a fire on the floor, round which were about twenty dirty-looking Spaniards of the most ruffianly appearance. As we approached, these men started to their feet, and looked anything but pleasantly at us. Telling our interpreter to translate what we said, we bowed most politely to these rascals, told them we were English; and having heard much of the civility and hospitality of the Spaniards, especially of those in the Sierra Morena, we had come to visit them, but were surprised to hear from the landlord that our presence was objected to, in which we believed the landlord was mistaken. If, however, any gentleman did object to us, we hoped he would speak. Whilst our man was translating this speech, we slipped a hand into our pocket, and just shewed the butt of one of our revolvers, a movement which did not escape the notice of the Spaniards. In another minute we had shaken hands with these men, had liberally supplied them with cigarettes, and had joined their circle round the fire, whilst one of them was toasting a rabbit for us, which he held by aid of a long fork over the burning embers. That night we slept again in a small room with a doorway, but no door. A chair tilted up close by it, so as to fall at the slightest touch, was our sentinel, and we passed a quiet night. Ten days

after our visit to this venta, two men were murdered near it, and we afterwards found that a discussion had taken place relative to capturing us, but that a knowledge of our being armed had decided these gallant fellows, though twenty to one, to leave us alone, and wait for a better chance.

WHAT'S HIS FAULT?

THE man who can ride twelve stone, may procure a horse to suit him at a reasonable figure, but that weight once passed, the price increases for every additional stone in a most disproportionate manner. This truth was borne in upon me, as a country clergyman of limited income, but growing portliness, with especial force, on a certain occasion of my being in want of a steed. A month passed in inquiries, which led only to abortive deals; sometimes it was the horse, at others, the price, which did not please me, and I was beginning to despair, when a man rode up to my rectory one morning on exactly the sort of animal I wanted—stout, strong, but handsome withal. The man was not dressed after the fashion affected by those who live by dealing in horses; there was nothing smart or natty about him; he wore thick shoes, and his loose and badly cut trousers rucked up, shewing as much stocking as a Senior Wrangler on the Trumpington Road.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said, dismounting somewhat ungracefully: 'I heard, at the village, a couple of miles off, where I put up last night, that you were looking out for a horse.'

I had learned several lessons during the last few weeks, and one was, never to appear anxious. The faintest expression of desire to possess an animal invariably seemed to beget in the dealer's mind an unwillingness to part with it. So I said carelessly: 'Well, I am in no particular hurry; but if I met with a horse that suited me at a moderate price, I might possibly make an offer for him.'

'What do you think of this one?' asked the man.

'What is his age?' I replied, with Caledonian caution.

'Rising seven, sir. Look at his mouth.'

I looked at his mouth, and, though unable to read his exact age therein, I saw that his teeth were all sound, and not worn at all; so he could not be very old.

'Try him, sir,' was the next suggestion; so I lengthened the stirrup, and mounted. He walked quite five miles an hour; trotted about twelve, I should say, and his canter was the easiest motion a Sybarite could wish for. I could detect no timidity, vice, or unsoundness about him. In short, the animal seemed to be exactly what I wanted, and it was with some secret nervousness that I asked his price, for I feared that it would be a very high one, far beyond my capabilities.

'Well, sir,' said the man, 'make me an offer. You see, he continued, 'I will tell you exactly how it is. I went into the North with six horses, and sold five. I kept this one, to sell in London next hunting season, meaning to send him out with the Queen's stag-hounds with a good man. Well, sir, at Lincoln, I got a letter from a Prussian gentleman I have often had business with, offering me a situation in the government breeding-stables in Germany: too good a thing to refuse, it is. So

I must be off at once, and send this horse to Tattersall's to fetch what he will. So there you have it. Make me an offer.'

'Well,' said I, 'I do not require a very extravagant animal; I only want something to carry sixteen stone or so, and draw a chaise, and that is sound and quiet, and I cannot give more than forty pounds for a horse.'

'That is very little; but still, there is the expense of his standing at Tattersall's, and the commission and the risk. Say fifty, and you shall have him.'

Now, as I had not thought for a moment that a hundred pounds would buy the animal, this proposition quite took my breath away.

'I should like a veterinary surgeon to see him,' I said.

'Very good,' replied the man. 'I have no objection, provided he is close at hand. But I must go on to-night; and if the horse is not sold, I must take him with me.'

'I could not get professional advice before to-morrow at the earliest,' said I.

'Never mind; I will give you a warrant,' replied the dealer.

I was tempted, for it did seem to be a bargain. I looked the horse over carefully, stroked his legs down with my hands, and tried to find a blemish, but could not. And while I was going through this process, he rubbed his nose against my shoulder, and then poked it into my pocket, to see if I had some such delicacy there as an apple or a carrot, in which proved him free from vice.

'Well,' I said finally, 'I know nothing about horses myself; and since you cannot allow time for him to be examined, forty pounds must be my last bid.'

'Say fifty.'

'No; forty.'

'Forty-five.'

'No; forty.'

'At least you will make it guineas!'

I agreed to that; and he came into my study, where he drew up a warranty and a receipt; and I gave him a cheque for forty-five guineas, the three extra to include the saddle and bridle, which he reasonably urged that it would be troublesome to take with him. When he had eaten some dinner, and was departing, I said to him: 'The bargain is made now, for good or bad, and if the horse dies to-morrow, it is my loss, so just tell me fairly, What is his fault?'

'Fault, sir?' replied the dealer. 'None at all, that I know of. Honour bright; if I knew anything against the horse, I would tell it you.' And he departed.

I determined to ride over at once to Mr Plew, the nearest farmer, and ask him to give my horse board and lodging for a day or two, till I should be able to get a man to act as groom, and make other necessary arrangements. On my way, I met my wife returning from a cottage where there was illness, and asked her how she liked my new purchase. 'What a beauty!' she exclaimed. 'I knew you would be enticed into extravagance. What did you give for it?'

'Forty guineas.'

'Really! Oh, what's its fault?'

Mr Plew readily acceded to my request.

'You have got a good un to look at, at last, anyhow,' said the farmer. 'A good price too, I guess.'

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I grew so tired at last of that perpetual question, that I began almost to wish that I could find some blemish in my bargain, if it were only to be able to give a satisfactory answer; but really the animal seemed to be perfect, his sole undesirable quality being, that he was so quiet in harness, that my wife could drive him, and liked to do so, which interfered occasionally with my rides. Before I had had him six weeks, the squire offered a hundred guineas for him, and I refused it. That one fact is more eloquent than several pages of eulogistic description.

Six months after I had acquired this cheap paragon, my wife went to stay with one of our married daughters, who was settled near Lincoln, and I was to pay a shorter visit before she left, making a clergyman's week of it. From my parish to Lincoln, it was seventy miles, and an old college friend had a living forty miles off on the direct road. So I determined to kill two birds with one stone, by riding to Lincoln in two days, and spending the intermediate night with Hughes, whom I had long promised to look up. And a very enjoyable ride I had, with all my luggage in the saddle-bags before me. Ah! it was not the railway, but the coach that destroyed the pleasurable romance of travelling. When the usual way of going about was on horseback, and nobody was expected to carry much luggage with him, and there was a good chance of being robbed and murdered, and a certainty of losing your way every now and then, a journey had some excitement about it. The exercise of riding is of itself both enjoyable and health-giving; to sit in the corner of the most comfortable carriage is neither.

Hughes received me with signs of joy, admired my nag, asked his price, and made the usual remark on hearing it: 'What's his fault?'

'Not much, I imagine,' I replied. 'I have ridden him forty miles to-day, and he is as fresh and elastic in step as when I started.'

'And you are not a feather-weight,' added Hughes rather unnecessarily.

I started again next morning, stopping half-way to bait. The host admired my horse very much indeed; I was quite surprised at the notice he took of it, and at last rather offended, for his manner impressed me with the idea that he thought it rather strange that I should be riding so good a one.

'Mr Higgins ought to see that 'ere animal,' he remarked to his hostler in my hearing, as I sat by the coffee-room window, eating some bread and cheese. 'Go and ask him to step round.'

I was in the saddle again, and on the point of starting, when this Mr Higgins made his appearance on a cob.

'That's a nice horse of yours,' this gentleman observed; 'I should like to have a look at him, if you do not mind.'

'Thank you, sir,' I replied stiffly; 'my horse is not for sale, and I have a long ride still before me.'

And I started off at a round trot, Mr Higgins following on the cob. The man may have been going to Lincoln, whether I had come by or not, but he certainly appeared to be dogging me. When I trotted, he trotted; when I checked my pace to let him pass, he did the same. At last I urged my

horse, which was a very fast one, and tried to trot clean away from him; but though he had to gallop his cob on the hard road to do it, he kept within hail of me. This manœuvring brought us to Lincoln in less than two hours. At the entrance of the town, we met one of the county constabulary; and Mr Higgins, who was now about ten yards in rear of me, hailed him.

'Hi! constable. Take that man into custody. Mind he does not slip past you!'

I reined up, and looked right and left for the culprit, but saw no one save the man on the cob, and the policeman; and then it flashed across me that *I* was the culprit!

The constable laid his hand on my rein apologetically.

'Are you sure there is no mistake, sir?' he asked.

'None at all. It is most likely that rascal, Bob Bradshaw, who gets himself up capitally as a parson: does duty sometimes, I'm told.'

I was taken to prison, and brought up presently before—my son-in-law, who was not so undutiful as to commit me for trial, but, on the contrary, indignantly abused the poor constable for doing his duty.

You have guessed my horse's fault, I suppose. He was not spavined, broken-winded, or slandered; he was afflicted with neither thoroughpin nor splint. He had been stolen.

Moral.—Take care how you buy a horse from a total stranger.

THE BLOSSOMING OF AN ALOE.

CHAPTER XI.—A MEETING.

MR CAIRNES and his daughter were living in a large and handsome house at the Hastings end of the long monotonous row which bears the name 'Marine Parade' unmistakably upon its wearisome sameness in all the English watering-places along the south-eastern coast. Anne's health had improved, and she liked the place. She shrank from the idea of returning to Scotland; the Tors was too close to Barrholme; she could bear her burden of dread and anxiety more bravely, and unsuspected, in a place where no one knew or cared about David Mervyn. Of all the pain of which this terrible time was full, none was more present and torturing to Anne than the sense that she must be content with her neutral position of general family friend, not to be considered by the Barrholme people in any special way; to hear news when they chose to communicate it, to have it withheld when it did not occur to them to impart it, to be quite at their mercy with respect to the pulling at her heart-strings, which they would be unconsciously performing; to be only one of many 'inquiring friends.' Her illness, the previous period of torturing uneasiness and uncertainty, the flicker of what Anne acknowledged to herself, with her usual candour, *was* hope, the swift-coming disappointment, had shaken her nerves, and she felt she could ill endure that particular form of probation. So she staid on and on, and hoped to avoid returning to the Tors until suspense at least should have come to an end. For Anne's feelings there was none of

the luxury of expansion and expression. Wives and mothers, sisters and sweethearts, might freely discuss the war, and their several shares in its terrible and absorbing interest; even friends who were no more than friends might talk of it perpetually, and freely admit its prominence in their thoughts; but she was in none of these categories, and reserve was incumbent upon her.

Marion's letters were a great relief to Anne, though she could not loosen the curb of self-restraint, even in replying to them. David's sister was not absorbed in her new happiness and her new house, to the exclusion of the former feelings, which had sufficed until Love came and proclaimed himself lord of all; she thought of her brother, feared for him, gloried in him, and wrote about him frequently to her friend. It never occurred to Mrs Graeme that she made David a somewhat preponderant topic, considering that he was not Anne's brother also; this, however, did not come from selfishness, or want of consideration, but simply and naturally from habit. Marion had long been accustomed to be first and most important in Anne's life, to know that Anne's friends were few and her interests restricted, and to accept her identification of herself with all that concerned her (Marion) with the unhesitating and tacit confidence it deserved.

Lady Mervyn also wrote to Anne occasionally, and when she did so, she told her the latest news of David. Her ladyship's belief in her own theory of Anne's feelings was unshaken; indeed, she had interpreted the illness, of which Mr Cairnes had duly informed his daughter's friends at Barrholme, correctly, and was complacently affected by the notion, that here was the heiress, so ready to die for love of David, that there could be no doubt at all of her readiness to marry him, when he should return, wiser by all the experience of life he must have gained in the fulfilment of some of its severest duties. The mother had terrible pangs of fear sometimes, but they were few; she was for the most part cheerful and hopeful, capable of planning and scheming for the future; and time brought to her comparatively little of the dull aching agony of suspense which filled up the days of David's wife, and those of the woman who loved him, and who dwelt throughout those days in unconscious proximity.

Mr Cairnes was of a naturally adaptive disposition, and very good-natured and sociable; easy to get on with, and cheerfully ready to enter into the characteristic life of any place at which he happened to be sojourning. He was much attached to the Tors, and legitimately proud of the position he had acquired, and the respect he had won from his neighbours; but he was also well content to pass the summer at Hastings, with intervals of 'business' at Manchester, and 'having a look at' his Scottish estate. After his fears for Anne's health began to subside, he investigated the resources of the place, and adapted himself to it with equal good sense and temper. His house was very nearly the best at Hastings—quite the best to be had in a temporary way—and he liked the beach, the boats, the reading-room, the drives, the small excitement of daily arrivals and departures, and the sense of nearness to London, which placed 'a run up to town' among the number of his possible recreations, though he availed himself rarely of his opportunities in

that way. He took sea-baths with the utmost regularity, and contracted acquaintances with a facility which said more for his kind heart than for his dignity. Anne was much with him; and she strove conscientiously with the trouble that was in her heart, whenever it rose up between her and the discharge of the duties that lay to her hand; but in spite of every effort, she could not be the lively and entertaining companion who had made the hours pass so lightly in their Scottish home, and she was consciously relieved when her brother left her for the occasional absences enjoined by his business and his property. When she was thus left alone, Anne generally restricted her walks to the garden, but she went out in her carriage for solitary drives, or in a boat, accompanied by her maid.

It chanced that on the day after Anne and her father had heard Lucy Mervyn sing the old song which had such subtle power of association for Anne, Mr Cairnes left her for a short visit to Manchester, and the evening being beautiful, and the sea smooth, she thought she would endeavour to hear again the voice which had so delighted her ears and touched her heart. She had accurately noted the position of the singer, who had been sitting near the edge of the beach, with the slight foam of the gentle wave almost touching her feet, and hidden from observation on one side by a low rough wall, built in the sand and shingle, for some boatman's purposes, but now quite solitary and unused. Anne's hopes were not disappointed; when within a short distance of the spot, she bade the boatmen rest on their oars, and listened in the stillness. At first she heard no sound, and the low wall intervening, she did not discern Lucy's figure, but she soon saw a straw hat with a veil attached to it, lying on the top of the wall, and knew the lady she had seen on the previous evening was there. Presently the sweet, clear, powerful voice rose, not this time in the words of a song, but in the solemn rhythm of one of the grandest of the Psalms; and thrilled the heart of one at least of the unsuspected listeners. Great peace, and the fulness of trust for him she loved, and for herself, came to the soul of Anne Cairnes as Lucy lifted up the voice of praise:

O God, our help in ages past ;
Our hope for years to come ;
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our Eternal Home !

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From Everlasting, Thou art God !
To endless years the same !

'And we are all in His hands,' thought Anne, 'each one of us; as it was from the beginning, so it ever shall be, to endless years the same—safe, however, it may be with us, for shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' It was long since the peace which came to her with the swelling notes, full of lofty expression, had had possession of Anne; before it the fear which hath torment fled, and the vain hopeless longing for the desire of her eyes was stilled. Who could this woman, whose voice was full of the freshness of youth, be? Anne could not see her, but she pictured her to herself as beautiful, with a face as full of peace and nobility as her grand flexible

voice; which now sank into silence, but only to take up the strain again:

Beneath the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints shall dwell secure;
Protected by Thine arm alone,
So their defence is sure.

The singer rose, took her hat off the wall, and, apparently without noticing the boat, walked away up the beach towards the road, as she had done on the preceding evening. 'She is going home,' thought Anne. 'I have come a little too late;' and she followed the retreating figure with a wistful gaze, as Lucy gained the road, walked along it for a short distance, and then turned in at the entrance to a farm-house which Anne had often noticed in her drives. A long narrow orchard extended from the house to the road, and in one corner of it, adjoining the boundary hedge, there was a green trellised arbour, which in the summer had been covered with honeysuckle and roses.

She asked the boatmen if they could tell her who lived at the farm-house; but they 'belonged to Hastings,' and this being the St Leonard's side, they did not know. On the next day Anne Cairnes drove in the direction of the farm-house, and was occupied, until she reached it, in considering how it might be possible to ascertain the identity of the singer. No expedient suggested itself to her mind, and she directed the coachman to drive on along the road. After she had passed the farm-house by nearly a mile, her attention was attracted to a wayside group by the crying of a child; and she saw a woman with an infant in her arms stooping over a sturdy little girl of five or six years old, who had damaged her knee by falling on a sharp stone, and was sitting on the edge of the pathway screaming, rather with fright and anger than with pain. The woman, encumbered with the infant, was trying to appease the little girl, but ineffectually. Anne stopped the carriage, and got out. At sight of her, the child ceased crying, so that it was plain she was not much hurt; and in answer to her questions, the woman explained that she had some distance to go in order to take the child home, and hardly knew how to get her along.

'Where is your home?' asked Anne.

'Nearly a mile from here, towards St Leonard's.'

'Get into the carriage,' said Anne. 'I will take you home.'

The offer was thankfully accepted, and the little girl was more than consoled; though she was very shy, and would not speak to Anne, who talked kindly to the nurse, admiring the baby, and curiously inspecting the delicate embroidery on the little creature's dainty dress. It was all her mamma's work, the nurse said.

'They are sisters, of course,' said Anne.

In this supposition she was, however, mistaken. The baby's mother was lodging in the house of the elder child's parents, and the nurse had taken her out for a walk; a kindness which, to judge from her voice and expression, she was not likely to repeat. Then she thanked Anne again for her timely help, and said they were getting very near. In a few minutes she pointed to the gate of the identical farm-house in which Anne felt so much interested, and said it was there her mistress lived. She would have got out at the gate, but Anne insisted on depositing the hurt child safely at the house; and as the carriage turned in at the gate,

she was rewarded by the sight of a lady, whose figure she recognised, standing in the open doorway of the little arbour, and looking astonished at the dignified manner of the nurse's return. The little girl was gently set down within the house-door—it was lying open, and there was nobody about—and the nurse turned to meet her mistress in the avenue. Anne sat in the carriage waiting until she came up, having received the nurse's explanation, and thanked her in a few simple words. Anne had been right in her presumption: the lady's face was as sweet and as beautiful as her voice, but it was sadly worn and delicate. 'She is in trouble of some deep and wearing kind,' thought Anne, after she had said the few words of course, which were all the occasion admitted of; 'she is too young to look so sad otherwise.' An acute observer would have remarked the same of Anne herself, though her dark complexion and more firmly cut features bore the wear and tear of emotion with less testimony to them than did the delicate face of David Mervyn's 'Wild Rose.'

'If I had only known in time where we were going to stop,' Anne thought, 'I could have made use of the opportunity to find out who she is, and where she comes from. The nurse would have told me. Perhaps she is a widow, poor young thing.' When she returned from her drive, Anne told her maid—who had observed her interest in the singer on the previous evening—of her little adventure; and the damsels, who was, like all her dependants, attached to Anne, made up her mind that the information her mistress wished for should be forthcoming. Accordingly, before she presented herself with the letters in her mistress's room on the next morning, she had possessed herself of the following facts. The lady-lodger at the farm-house was a Mrs Martin, from London; her husband, an officer in the army, was 'out at the war'—such was the vague phrase in use at the time by that large portion of the British nation who knew neither where nor what the Crimea was—and she was very down-hearted in consequence, and also said to be in delicate health. Mrs Martin never went anywhere, and had no visitors except a sister, who came occasionally from London. She was a popular lodger with Farmer Evans and his wife, giving very little trouble, and singing of an evening, so that it was as good as church, or the great concert in the season, to hear her. Mrs Martin had been lodging at Farmer Evans's a good while, and there was no sign of her leaving yet. Anne listened to all this with much interest. The curiosity and admiration inspired by the unknown lady's singing had been increased by her beauty and her youth, and they received a fresh impetus from the additional link of association formed by her interest in the scene on which Anne's mind was fixed. Anne was not impulsive, and she was less given to the formation of sudden friendships than most girls, but she felt strongly tempted to act on impulse now; to call on Mrs Martin, acknowledge that she had been a surreptitious listener to her even-song, and ask her to accompany her in her drives, and in those quiet boating expeditions which would, she was convinced, do the anxious, delicate, young wife good. Miss Cairnes purposed this unconventional proceeding seriously, all because the stranger had a beautiful voice, and a husband in the Crimea! A little, also, because she was bored by her own Hastings acquaintances,

and longed for congenial companionship. She looked at the notion, and it pleased her; but, looking still farther, she began to hesitate. What if she were to do this, and it were to be ill received, regarded as impertinence, in any way rebuked? She relinquished the scheme with a sigh, and resolved, instead of resorting to such decided means, to throw herself in the stranger's way, and trust to another happy accident.

CHAPTER XII.—FATALITY.

A change of weather, bringing three days of rain, made it useless for Miss Cairnes to go out in her boat in order to listen to the siren; on the fourth day, she met Mrs Martin, face to face, at the post-office. Anne's business there was to register and despatch a small packet destined for Marion Graeme; Lucy's, to have a letter to her husband weighed and stamped. Lucy's letter—the address downwards—was in the scale, when Anne Cairnes entered, and approaching the counter, laid down her parcel and stated her requirement.

'In a moment, madam,' said the clerk, civilly; and then to Lucy: 'Over-weight, ma'am; one-and-sixpence, if you please.' He handed the letter to her, and at the same moment Anne recognised Mrs Martin.

'Mrs Gordon Graeme, Nutwood, near Dalbeattie, Galloway, N. B.' muttered the clerk, as he filled up a register form. The stranger turned quickly, and looked at Anne, who availed herself of the movement to inquire for the little girl whom she had picked up, and for the stranger's own child. Lucy answered with evident embarrassment that the children were well, and that Mrs Evans was very grateful for her kindness. The clerk interrupted the conversation, if so it can be called, by asking Lucy whether he should give her stamps for her letter. But she had put it in her pocket, and said: 'No; she would add to it, and bring it back to-morrow.' Then she bowed to Anne, and walked to the door. Anne ardently wished to prolong this chance interview. But how to do it? The weather settled the question. It had been threatening a few minutes before, now the rain was coming down heavily. Lucy wore a light dress, and had not an umbrella. Anne's closed carriage was at the door.

'You must allow me to take you home,' said Miss Cairnes: 'I am going your way, and you must not walk in this rain.'

'Thank you!' said Lucy: 'you are very kind; but I can wait.'

'Pray, don't refuse to let me do you this little service,' said Anne; and she said it so earnestly that Lucy could not hold out. She stepped into the carriage, and Anne felt elated at her triumph. In spite of Lucy's reserve and timidity, she was attracted towards Anne, and long before they reached Evans's farm, they were talking with tolerable ease. Anne told Lucy that she had heard her sing, and how delighted she and her father had been with one song in particular.

'It is *Ben Bolt*,' said Anne; 'a great favourite with us both, and a song I have often sung; though now that I have heard *you* sing it, I don't think I shall ever have the courage to attempt it again. It is a popular song in our part of the world—the south of Scotland.'

'I like it very much too,' said Lucy; 'and it

is a great favourite with—with my husband.' Her face flushed, and her lips trembled.

'He is not with you?'

'He is with his regiment in the Crimea.'

'Ah!' said Anne, 'how deeply I can feel for you; one of our dearest friends is there too. Who is there that has not a friend there?' And then the girl, whose own heart never ceased to ache with a silent dread, spoke comfort and courage to the poor young wife, recalling to her the words of the Psalm which she had breathed in such grand music, and talking the sweet woman's talk by which so much sorrow has been beguiled, and so much fear has been dispersed. They reached their destination too soon for Anne, who took leave of her new acquaintance with much kindness.

'You will let me come and see you again,' she said; 'and you will drive out with me sometimes. I quite understand that you like to be very quiet; but you do not look strong, and the air, without fatigue, would do you good.'

'You are very, very kind.'

'And you will be very kind too, and not refuse me. May I come for you to-morrow?'

'Not to-morrow,' said Lucy; 'I have something to do.'

'On Wednesday, then, at three o'clock?'

'If—if you wish it—yes.'

'It will give me the greatest pleasure. But I must not keep you standing. Good-bye.'

Lucy had got out of the carriage, and was standing by the step, and Anne was leaning down towards her, for a farewell shake-hands, and final gaze into her lovely face. Moved by a simultaneous impulse, the two women kissed each other.

The carriage had neared the gate, and the house-door had closed upon Lucy, when Anne remembered that neither had told the other her name. It was not so extraordinary that she should not have asked Mrs Martin's name, because she already knew it; but it certainly was odd that Mrs Martin—who was very unlike the sort of woman to whom a fine carriage and a fashionable gown would serve as a recommendation—should not have asked hers. Perhaps Mrs Martin had heard of her indirectly, even as she had heard of Mrs Martin. At all events, she must repair the inadvertence. So she returned to the house, and gave her card to the servant: *Miss Cairnes, Victoria Lodge*, and, in pencil—*Douro House*. Then she drove away content.

Lucy went up to her room, and took out her letter. She smoothed it, and laid it on the table. It was addressed to Captain Mervyn.

'If she had seen it,' thought Lucy, 'what would she have guessed? If I had not seen her packet addressed to David's sister, what might I not have said that would have put her on the track of the truth? How strange that she and I should have met—she of whom David has so often told me, his sister's great friend, the one to whom he had thought of confiding the fact of our marriage, in the first instance. She has a sweet, kind face, and makes one trust her; and I think if I had known her, I should not have been so fearful of their knowing it, and of being with them; but it is too late now; David must tell his own story, when he comes home.'

Then Lucy considered whether she should open her letter, and add to it the story of her meeting with Miss Cairnes: how she had known who she

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was the moment her ear caught the words which the post-office clerk had muttered, because David had faithfully described to her his sister, and his sister's friend; and how, though agitating, the meeting had been very sweet to her, from the feeling that they were both thinking of him, and from Miss Cairnes's picture of the affection which was felt for him in his home. Anne, in speaking of the common public solicitude which now bound so many hearts together in a bond which had no previous existence, had told her much about her own neighbours at Barrholme. But Lucy decided against telling David all this now; she would not disturb him with any notion of her having been placed in a false position, of her having incurred any risk of unpleasantness.

The thoughts of Anne Cairnes ran in a far different channel. There was something in this meeting which pleased her fancy, and touched her heart. She almost envied the lot of the young wife, who had the right to be in trouble, and to tell it to whom she would. And she must be happy, that young wife, despite all her trouble; there was a serene light of sanctioned love in her beautiful face; heavenly content must underlie her grief; content which was never to come to Anne Cairnes, one blessing beyond price, to be excluded from her richly-endowed lot. There was no touch of repining in Anne's reflections, but there was just that quick and sensitive realisation of what might have been, which cannot come without a sensible pang to even the best-disciplined mind. In this new acquaintance she foresaw a great resource. Whether Mrs Martin's evident solitude was voluntary or involuntary, Anne had no means of judging; she might be without friends or relatives, except the sister who could only come to her occasionally; and in that case, Anne might be able to do her real service, to perform towards her one of those acts of charity, the doing of which, whenever they came to her hand, Anne recognised as among the stringent obligations of the Christian life. Her solitude might be voluntary, and in that case, Anne must trust to winning her consent to its occasional interruption. Altogether the incident had excited Anne, had set her weaving one of those harmless webs of girlish romance, in which her steady and genuinely humble mind rarely indulged. Of course, the stranger, no matter how well she should come to know her, could never replace Marion; that was quite a settled thing with Anne; but Marion was away, Marion was surrounded by friends, and she thought, she hoped, this young lady, so lovely, and so lorn, might *want her*. That was a great point with Anne: that she should be *wanted* by some one; should be necessary in some way to the happiness of some one's life. Of course, she always was so to her father's, and there her heart rested; but its sympathies were wide and deep, and various, and, for the most part, unfilled. She gave lavishly, of the large sums which her father placed at her disposal; but beyond that, there were conditions of her life which Anne was always longing to share. Her home, and its luxuries, her carriage, her garden, her books, every pleasure which her wealth commanded; she would have enjoyed them all doubly with the power of sharing them. With the natural quickness of a woman on such points, she had discerned that Mrs Martin was not rich. She was evidently in

inexpensive lodgings; and the delicate beauty of her child's clothing was not reproduced in her own, which was simple, and, though the dress of a lady, had nothing of luxury about it. Anne had visions of Mrs Martin driving and boating with her, walking in her garden, reading her books, playing on her piano, and enjoying the fruit and flowers which are among the permissible gifts of the rich. The time flew that evening, and Anne had not felt so happy since the beginning of the war. She wrote a long letter to her father, full of Mrs Martin, and she eagerly searched the Army List for a record of Captain Martin's name and services. Mrs Martin had not mentioned the arm of the service to which her husband belonged, but Anne found it out easily; Captain Martin was in an infantry regiment of distinction. She could not be mistaken; there was no other Captain Martin in any of the regiments serving in the Crimea. She was surprised to find that he was much older than she had imagined Mrs Martin's husband to be; and had been ten years in his regiment. Her active fancy had drawn a pretty picture of the young husband, of a gallant, youthful soldier, like David Mervyn, and this gentle girlish creature. But the same active fancy had but to charge its palette afresh, and paint a second picture, hardly less attractive, in which the young soldier was replaced by a man forty years of age, with a grave bronzed face; to whom the girlish wife should cling with all the added trust and dependence of the disparity between their respective ages.

The following day passed over quickly, and on the Wednesday morning Anne woke with the feeling, so rare to her of late, that something pleasant and new was in prospect. Her maid brought her letters, and among them was one which had not come by post, and was directed in a hand which she did not recognise.

'Where did this come from, Fleming?' Anne asked her maid.

'A boy brought it at seven o'clock, and said there was no answer.'

Anne carelessly opened the envelope, and read these lines, dated on the previous evening:

I regret very much, dear madam, that it will be impossible for me to avail myself of your kind invitation to drive with you to-morrow. I am obliged, quite unexpectedly, to leave St Leonard's by the earliest train in the morning.—With many thanks for your kindness, I am, dear madam, yours very truly,

L. MARTIN.

Blank disappointment took possession of Anne. She looked at the little letter, and turned it over, as if by that means she might extract more information from it than it had to give. Her brief romance had vanished into thin air; her new friend had gone, and left no trace behind. It took Anne some time to rally from the disappointment; and when her father returned, and she told him about it, she felt half inclined to resist the form which his attempted consolation took. Perhaps, Mr Cairnes suggested, it was as well that circumstances had interfered to prevent her from contracting an intimacy with a person of whom she really knew nothing, except that she had a beautiful face and a fine voice. That she really had a beautiful face, Mr Cairnes was willing to allow, though he could personally vouch only for the voice; but his daughter, who had

a considerable talent for taking likenesses, had amused herself, on the evening of her meeting with Mrs Martin, by making a pencil-sketch of her face, from memory, promising herself, when the hoped-for friendship should be an accomplished fact, to paint a highly finished miniature from it.

'I could not have remained,' pleaded Lucy with her sister—who was inclined to blame her precipitate retreat from St Leonard's—'I could not repulse Miss Cairnes's kindness, and I could not go on deceiving her; neither could I tell her my secret, and ask her to conceal it from David's parents and his sister. You see now that I was right, since there was a secret to keep, to call myself by another name. I should have been constantly afraid, if I had used my own, of some such accident happening as has actually occurred. And David will think so too when he comes home.'

THE OPENING DOOR.

I AM a mining engineer. At the time of which I am writing, I was manager of an extensive colliery in the South Lancashire district. We employed a large number of men, very various, of course, in character. It is not my purpose to describe all particularly, but we had among us several good specimens of the collier of the last generation; men who commenced pit-life when women shared their daily drudgery, who did the toughest part of their life's work when there were no government inspectors to watch over their interests; men, now subdued and quiet, who could tell tales of coal-pit life in the old rough wild days to which the present are tameness itself. These men were superstitious to an amusing degree, constantly on the look-out for signs and omens, not in 'the falling leaf, the snapping twig' exactly, but in the snapping and falling treacherous roof of the mine; in the accidental extinguishing of lights; in the simmering of gas-bubbles, working their way through the wet 'face' of the coal; also in dreams, whether their own, or any one else's. I used to laugh at their sometimes expressed fears; but the time came when I could at least sympathise with them.

I was sitting in the office, near the pit, one hot summer's afternoon. It was a hot place, being adjacent to the boilers, and a noisy one into the bargain, being situated over a steam saw bench. My temper had been a little disturbed by the pertinacious endeavours of a traveller in iron to draw an order from me, a process which, having no need of iron, I particularly objected to, and which he, needing orders, particularly insisted on. I had shewn my gentleman out four times, but, with the brazen effrontery of his tribe, he would persist in returning, till I was obliged at last to shut and bolt the door, thereby effectually stanching the flow of his blandishments, but also making the office more and more like a drying-stove. Presently I peeped out of the window: my persecutor was gone. I opened the door: in front of it, about to knock, stood old Jemmy Taylor. Jemmy was one of the patriarchal colliers I have mentioned above; in

appearance, a skeleton, dressed in a tight suit of parchment; gaunt, grim, and gray-haired; no model for Apollo, even in his best days, for all his limbs had undergone fracture once, or oftener, which process is no beautifier of the human frame. There he was, in his skull-cap, faded blue shirt, and ragged old velveteen coat and trousers: as he had stood many a time before when he had desired an interview with me upon questions of ventilation; for Jemmy was our head 'wasteman.'

I may explain here, that, in pit language, the waste means the old workings, that district of the mine from which the coal has been removed. Most parts of the waste are left to take care of themselves, which they speedily do by closing again into solidity; but through other parts it is often necessary to maintain air-roads; passages to carry on the stream of air from one part of the mine to another, or out to the vent, the upcast shaft. The office of the wasteman is to keep these roads in order, and see that they do not become blocked up by fallen shale, so as to impede or stop the ventilation. It is impressive, even to one accustomed to them, to travel along these waste roads. You may walk hundreds and hundreds of yards along the low narrow passages, far away from the working-places of the colliers; and more complete isolation you could not feel, I believe, in the middle of a desert. It would be an awkward thing to lose your light, too, on one of these journeys. If well acquainted with the roads, it would be possible to find your way back to occupied ground, or forward to the upcast shaft, whither the current of air is hurrying; but it would be a nasty journey, of much excoriation of legs, arms, and head against the rough tunnel; and should you by chance be so unfortunate as to wander out of the main current of air, your safest guide, you might very possibly have to resign yourself to fate, and sit down in the forlorn hope of being discovered by a search-party.

I invited Jemmy in. It was something out of the ordinary way of business which could make him look so scared through his covering of coal-dust. He seemed so upset, that I thought of asking him to sit down, but remembered in time, that a collier sitting in a chair is as comfortable as the proverbial cat on a hot plate. Your collier can kneel, can lie on his side, can sit on his heels, can stoop in any excruciating posture you may please to name, by the hour together; but ask him to sit in a chair, and you propose an impossibility. The cause of Jemmy's perturbation did not come out quickly; it required much questioning, also several applications to a flat bottle to get his not very connected story from him. It appeared that, in the course of his work, he had remembered that some forgotten props had been left in a certain road midway in the waste. They were lying near an 'air-door,' a tight-fitting, wooden door placed in a roadway, to prevent the air from passing along it. He accordingly set off in search, found the props, and sat down to rest while deciding upon their merits. He placed his lamp upon

the floor, and was just pulling out his pipe for a smoke (irregular Jemmy), when his attention was drawn to the door through which he had just passed. It was slowly opening! Well, there would be nothing wonderful in that, provided the opener had passed through and made himself visible; only, as none did pass through, and as the door, after opening to nearly its full extent, slowly and silently closed again, there certainly was a little foundation for Jemmy's astonishment. Then, 'As I sot theer,' said Jemmy, 'thinkin' what could make it oppen, it sturred agen, and kep' cropin and cropin, wider and wider, till it wur reet open agen! I ne'er touched it; I wur three yard off. I wur no' so much feart' fust time, but atherwards'— After opening the second, Jemmy was greatly horrified, to tell the truth, and wished to beat a retreat; but to do so he must repass through the door itself! He managed to screw up his courage for this, opened it, shook it, to see that the hinges were firm, closed it after him, and on the express engine of trepidation, commenced to retire. In the fascination of terror, however, he felt compelled to look back, and hoped that the sight of the door fast closed might reassure him; but no sooner did he turn round, than, lo! open comes the door again, in the same steady style as before, and closes in like manner. 'Three times!' thought Jemmy. 'I'm done for!' He, a most cool and clear-headed fellow in all matters connected with his special business, was, as such men often are, very accessible to fear of the unknown. What he had witnessed was, of course, a 'sign,' expressly sent to warn him of approaching danger, probably of an untimely end. When he had finished his tale, I naturally pooh-poohed the whole matter, said he must have been dreaming, sent him home to recover himself, and told him I would meet him in the mine next day, and go with him to the diabolical spot, and see if the phenomenon occurred again: not that I said 'phenomenon' to Jemmy, as it might have increased his fears, but 'words to that effect.'

I had rather a long round to make next morning in a part of the mine we were just opening, and it was noon when I met Jemmy in the 'gal-stable.' (All horses are 'gals,' down Lancashire pits: above ground, young women are 'lasses.') It was with some little difficulty that I persuaded him to get off the provender-box and accompany me on the proposed expedition; but at last we set out, and were presently travelling along the silent road in the deserted waste. I questioned him closely: but though he was now cool, he persisted in the accuracy of his story. I could only conclude that his memory had failed him in some important particular, or that he had been too frightened to notice something which would at once explain the apparent mystery. Half an hour of awkward stooping through half a mile of very low air-passages, and clambering over fallen roof, brought us to the spot. The passage, just where the air-door stood, was in tolerable preservation, and was comparatively wide and high—some six feet by four. The door was some four feet square, set in a brick framework: a good substantial door of thick deal;

tolerably heavy for spiritual influences, I thought. Jemmy had hung back as we approached it, and it was only by half-dragging him along that I got him through. We anchored upon the prostrate props. 'Now, Jemmy,' I said, 'let's just see if your door will play any such tricks to-day.' I was certain that, if the manifestation was not a figment of Jemmy's imagination, which seemed only too probable, I should, on seeing it occur myself, be able at once to explain it.

We lighted pipes: against the rules, I must confess, below ground, but an indulgence which I could allow myself with certain trusty men who never abused liberties. 'He's going to disappoint us,' I said; 'you have made me lose an hour for nothing.' Here Jemmy's pipe fell from his teeth, and he clutched hold of me nervously. 'Look, look! Master Thomas! look—its oppenin' now!' Sure enough, it was, and in the manner in which he had described it. As if drawn by an unseen hand, gently, almost imperceptibly, it came open—just a little streak first, and then wider and wider, till one could peer through it into the dim darkness beyond, half-expecting an earthly visitor, half-fearing a ghostly one. Then slowly, as it had opened, did it shut, closing up silently with a perfect evenness of motion. A little bewildered, I started up, to make a good examination round it, to see if the movement was explainable by any of the surrounding circumstances; but Jemmy begged me to stay where I was, and see 'if it would do so again.' I did so. In two minutes the phenomenon was repeated; in another two minutes it was again repeated; but although we sat still on the props for a quarter of an hour longer, the door opened no more. Poor Jemmy was in a fearfully nervous state by this time, and I myself did not feel altogether composed. The dead, oppressive silence—tomb-like silence—of the place we were in; the 'darkness visible' which surrounded us for a few yards; the darkness unfathomable which closed in around us beyond that area; the feeling of isolation too, and the intent waiting to see whether the mysterious occurrence would be repeated, all helped, with the puzzling over the thing itself, to upset one's equanimity. As I say, we waited a quarter of an hour longer, and the 'sign,' as Jemmy persisted in considering it, did not come again: he rather wished it would, I believe, for the number three was a fatal one in his dictionary of omens; and say what I would, nothing could make him shake off his fixed idea that it was a 'death-warrant' for him. 'Now for a good look at the sign-worker,' said I. A careful examination I made of the door, side-posts, lintel, brickwork, surrounding walls, roof and floor; but nothing could I discover at all capable of explaining the apparent self-action. A quick subsidence of roof, or upheaval of floor, as frequently happens in the passages of a mine, might explain the opening; but no such movement of the surrounding strata had taken place while we were there; and, besides, though such a disturbance might open the door, it would be hardly likely to close it again, especially in such a slow and steady way. I was puzzled, and more than puzzled, I will confess. I did not believe that anything but a natural force could move that door; but what natural force did move it? My reader may ask, why should I feel more nervous and strange at seeing this door

move unexplainedly, than I should at seeing a tree fall unexpectedly, or at hearing a voice from an apparently empty room. It would be, I think, because, in the case of the tree and the voice, the mind would almost directly fix on a sufficient natural cause for the occurrence; and fear would hardly have time to make itself felt. Prolong the interval before you fix upon a sufficient cause, and fear has time to assert itself. In the case of the door, the interval of suspense was prolonged indefinitely, for I could find no sufficient reason at all. I left the mine, as I say, puzzled, and more than puzzled.

That evening, however, I thought I had found an explanation, and, of course, instantly all nervousness left my mind, and I laughed heartily at the matter. I hunted up Jemmy from the public-house, where he was relating to a spell-bound circle of fellow-workmen his experiences of the last two days. 'Jemmy,' I said, 'I've found it out.' 'Fun it aight, han ye, Master Thomas? What is't, and what makes it three times?' 'Why, don't you see,' said I triumphantly, and perhaps a shade contemptuously, 'it is an air-door, and the pressure of the air increasing a little now and then, it gets strong enough to blow the door open!' But alas for my theory—in two minutes it was demolished by Jemmy, whose face lost again its momentary cheerfulness. 'Connot be that, 'can ye see th' door opens agin th' air—th' air, be it much or be it little, is *aways pressin' it to*.' I had to give in to Jemmy's practical reasoning: what he said, was true; the pressure of air could not explain it, for how could the door open of itself against the current, whether strong or weak?

For several days I perplexed myself about the dreadful door, and its opening and shutting, till I wished it at Jericho. I found that several of the men went, always two or three together, to see the phenomenon, which was daily repeated; and it was further noted that it always occurred at or near one o'clock; that the door always opened and shut three times, no more, no less, and at about the first observed intervals. They could none of them explain it. Wild theories were started by the younger and three R'd men, such as, that air possessed certain powers of suction, as well as of pressure, and that, when it wanted to pass through a door, it was equal on a pinch to opening it for itself! But the older men shook their heads, and pronounced it uncanny, something to do with the next world, a genuine omen. They were unanimous also in the opinion that the warning was intended only for its first witness, poor Jemmy! The fame of this opening door even got so far as the neighbouring town, becoming, of course, magnified on the journey; and I was written to by some friends there to say they had heard there was a door at the colliery which rapped out answers like a medium's table! The enterprising editor of that town even proposed to me that he should send down a special, to interview the case; but I declined, not wishing any factitious interest to be given to the matter.

It will seem strange to my readers, but it is a fact that the door-mystery repeated itself every day for three weeks, and was witnessed during that time by dozens of workmen, without any feasible or probable suggestion being made as to the cause. Many a night I lay awake thinking over it, going carefully over all principles of

mechanics I was acquainted with, to see if there lurked in any of them a possible explanation; but without result.

I discovered the natural cause in time; but I cannot claim that I reasoned it out. A simple coincidence gave me a clue tolerably easy to follow. Before publishing the rationale of the matter, however, I took it into my head to give Jemmy and others convincing proof that I had discovered the secret. I gave it out, that on a certain day the phenomenon would take place half an hour earlier, and would be repeated five instead of three times. Sure enough, the thing happened according to my prediction. Jemmy's face cleared up a little when he found that there was a being of flesh and blood by whom the mystery was explicable; his respect for me visibly increased; indeed, I rather think that in his mind, and in the minds of a few others, I was regarded as 'somebody extra,' dealing with the powers that should not be.

Here is the explanation, as shortly as I can put it to non-mining readers. The mine had two shafts, as is usual—the downcast, by which fresh air was supplied to the working; the upcast, up which the foul air escaped. The downcast was the ordinary working-shaft; but the upcast was furnished with winding engine and a travelling cage for occasional use. Now, when this cage was used, its passage downwards would naturally check the ascending volume of foul air, and would for the moment press it back down the shaft, and consequently would, to some degree, drive back the air which was in the ordinary way rushing along the air-roads. Now, returning for a moment to our old friend the air-door, we shall see the effect of this. We remember that the balance of air-pressure was against the door on the side on which it opened—the handle side; but when the cage descended the upcast, it would reverse for a moment the natural direction of the air-currents, and then the balance of air-pressure would be on the side of the door *opposite* to the handle, and would open it. When the cage stopped at the bottom of the upcast, the natural order of things would gradually restore itself, and the door would gradually close. The opening of the door would, of course, be repeated each time the cage descended the upcast. Its recurrence, three times, at a particular time each day, was explained by the fact, that a set of men, just numerous enough to fill the cage three times, were then working near the upcast, and were lowered to their work at that particular time each day. They were also drawn up and down at other periods of the day, and the air-door would have been seen opening and shutting at those times also, had there been any one there to observe it. Happening to be at the upcast when these men were descending, I was struck by the coincidence of the time, and of the number of descents of the cage, with the circumstances of the door opening, and this led me to unravel the mystery.

When I explained it to Jemmy, the poor fellow seemed to get rid of a nightmare; his parchment face became lustrous with relief. The other men, who had been quite as much 'struck of a heap' as Jemmy, anathematised themselves for not having seen it before, declared Jemmy to be a fool, and did not cease to joke him for a long time about his 'openin' door.' But he took it all very

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good-humouredly. He was, I have no doubt, as rejoiced to get that incubus off his mind as Sindbad was to get rid of the old man of the sea; and I was not sorry myself!

INVESTMENTS.

A VERY curious state of things has taken place regarding money. When it was scarce and much in demand, it could be invested at a good rate of interest; now, from the prodigious accumulation of capital, there are more lenders than borrowers, and money becomes what is called 'a drug in the market.' In short, after a man has accumulated a large sum, he does not very well know what to make of it, with any reasonable hope of advantage. Matters having arrived at this crisis, a great many ingenious persons interpose to offer their advice to afflicted capitalists. They invent projects to relieve people of their money on the most specious promises of a high rate of interest. Who of any mark has not been deluged with prospectuses of joint-stock companies without end?

The concocters of these pompously announced concerns for the most part rely on the ignorance of the public, feeling assured that the magnificence of the promised return will ward off any very close investigation into the good faith of those who initiate the scheme. A showy list of directors can easily be made up; and if a noble lord or two can be included in the number, the bait becomes all the more tempting. Some men of title, having little occupation for their time, are really willing to do a little 'City work' in an honourable way; partly for the influence it gives them in certain quarters, and partly for the directors' allowance of so much per day whenever they attend the 'Board'—men of title not being always men of wealth. Some allow their names to be used on the understanding that no loss or risk shall be incurred by them, and that fully paid-up shares shall be allotted to them as an *honorarium*. Some (as cases in the police and criminal courts too often inform us) are dragged in by company-promoters without their own consent; and the hapless man of title occasionally finds himself involved in the explosion of a bubble-company, the list of directors of which contains (to his astonishment) his own name. The purpose or work the proposed company professes to achieve, is very insufficiently taken into account. It may be of a character which a private firm could carry on better than a large company; it may even be so absurd as to deserve no consideration whatever; and yet a belief is held by company-projectors, founded on past experience, that there are foolish men who will invest in such enterprises. Charles Dickens's 'Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company,' was, of course, a mere invention; but it had its origin in actual facts; and names of men in good social position are to be found among the directors of companies only a little less ridiculous than it.

Political and financial economists have observed that there is a recurrence of this propensity at intervals of a few years, generally from eight to twelve. After a season of dull trade and timid enterprise, men pick up courage, and prove more adventurous; this progress becomes by degrees so wildly rapid, that 'prudent caution is laid aside, and reckless investments are made; then

occur bankruptcy, alarm, panic; rotten firms come to the ground, dragging with them others that are honest, but weak; and thus we arrive at the trough or hollow of the wave, to be followed by another uprise after a time.

The years 1872 and 1873, so memorable for the gigantic trade in iron and coal, and the enormous prices resulting therefrom, were also distinguished for their abundant crop of new joint-stock enterprises, companies professing to render invaluable services in all parts of the world, and tempting shareholders with a prospect of large dividends. In 1873 (taking one year as a sample of both) there were more than two hundred of these new schemes launched upon the London Stock Exchange, with an aggregate capital of sixty millions sterling; and (note the important fact) nearly fourteen millions sterling actual deposits to be paid by the applicants for shares. What became of all the money deposited, the history of the several companies must shew. Mr Spackman, an authority on this subject, grouped the two hundred companies into several classes—Investment, Telegraph, Mining, Colliery, Manufacturing and Trading, Banking, Financial, Railway, Insurance, Shipping, Gas, Water, Hotel, and (significant title!) 'Miscellaneous.' In addition to this, there were new issues of capital by old companies, to the extent of thirty-six millions sterling, of which an amount of twenty-four millions was called up within the year. Moreover, English lenders paid a large proportion of the foreign loans that were floated, and on which eighty-five millions sterling were advanced during the year, at interest ranging from 5 to 10 per cent. One requires to take a little breath after the mention of such stupendous sums as these.

The crop is still continuing in 1874, although with diminished intensity. Every week brings forth schemes concerning which we would advise an intending investor—'Don't.' Really good projects are brought into discredit by juxtaposition with others that are anything but good; and this is not the least part of the evil. The only security is, for persons who have a little money to spare, to 'look twice' before they allow themselves to be tempted by the offer of a high rate of interest. Every man must judge for himself whether the purpose of a proposed company is a reasonable one, and likely to pay a good return on the capital to be raised. Looking down the list, we take at random—The African Barter Company, the Beyrouth Waterworks Company, the Dried Vegetables Company, the Fine Arts Finance Company, the Havana Co-operative Association, the International Ice Company, the London and Brighton Cheap Coal Supply Company, the Railway Passengers' Luggage Insurance Company, the Season Ticket Bank Company, the Universal Drug Supply Company, the Weekly Tenements Investment Company, the Boiler Cleansing Company, &c. We know nothing of these concerns, favourable or unfavourable; they are adverted to simply as a means of shewing how indefatigable are company-makers in bringing oddities into the list.

One class of companies requires much caution—namely, that in which the money is to be spent in some foreign country. Beyrouth may very likely want an improved supply of water, Callao of gas, Lisbon of tramways; the townsmen or the respective governments may honestly intend to pay a

handsome rental for the use of these advantages ; and the directors of the water, gas, and tramway companies may with equal honesty intend that this rental shall furnish a handsome dividend to the shareholders who advance the necessary capital. But still the distance is a difficulty. Not one shareholder in a hundred has seen the country in which his money is to be sunk ; and if this money gilds too many palms in its passage, the fact is extremely difficult to draw to light—amid an English board of directors on the one hand and a foreign board on the other. Where the schemes come from wealthy cities, such as New York, Philadelphia, or the like, still more caution is needed ; because, if the enterprise is likely to pay well, the inhabitants of those places will be willing enough to provide the capital ; while, if they will not pay well, Englishmen may prudently keep out of such ventures. It is not a good sign that so many American railway companies are just now sending high-flown prospectuses to England. Speculation has been very intense across the Atlantic, and many investors have been sorely injured. For anything we know, there may be safe investments in the United States, but in the general disrepute into which they have fallen, our advice is to have nothing to do with one of them.

It is a marked feature, in connection with Stock Exchange enterprises, that country clergymen are inundated with prospectuses relating to new joint-stock schemes. From what source these documents come, the recipients are not fully aware ; nor why a quiet secluded parsonage should be thus bombarded. The truth seems to be that stock-brokers, share-dealers, secretaries, promoters of companies, and others behind the scenes, get hold of the clergy list, and send tempting documents to all the incumbents of parishes—in the hope that, out of twenty thousand fish, some at least will bite. Most incumbents have a little money to invest, a percentage of income laid aside for declining years, or for family use ; and it may possibly be that such persons, very much out of the busy world in their daily course of life, are easily imposed upon by offers of large rates of interest or dividend. Be this the case or not, it is known that clergymen figure largely in the lists of railway shareholders. It is also known that, unfortunately for themselves, many have been shareholders in the banks and insurance companies established some years ago, with unlimited liability, and have been brought to ruin by the failure of the more luckless of those concerns. Country gentlemen are in like manner appealed to by company-concocters, who send them pamphlets, circulars, and prospectuses in endless profusion ; all telling the same story, which may be summed up in these words : 'If you will invest in our concern, you will get large interest for your money.'

There is one scheme afloat, concerning which we may offer a few observations ; not because it tempts the incautious public with an exceptionally high return for capital, but because it hints at a questionable mode of obtaining the money which is to be invested. We do not choose to identify the company ; let it suffice to know that the English money is to be spent in a foreign region. Landed proprietors are appealed to, with temptations to speculate with money not really their own. They are told that, 'as land in England yields only from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. net return per annum

on the capital or saleable value of the land, it is evident that a landed proprietor who borrows money on the security of his land at a rate of from 4 to 5 per cent. per annum, is a party to a losing transaction, unless he can employ the money so borrowed at a higher rate of interest than 4 or 5 per cent. The operation of employing borrowed money to yield a higher return than the rate of interest at which it is borrowed, is the means by which bankers and men in every branch of trade and commerce are enabled to realise, if not fortunes, at least a large annual profit or income. There are few, however, if any, of our landed proprietors who employ in this manner the capital borrowed on the security of their land ; the obstacle being, not the absence of a desire to increase income, but the want of knowledge as to how the higher rate of interest could be obtained without running the risk of losing the whole or a portion of the capital.' We have italicised two passages, because they relate to what we cannot but think an unhealthy characteristic of such a scheme. To risk our own money is not the invitation here given : it is to risk the money borrowed from other people, without asking the permission of those who have lent it. We are favoured with an illustration of the prospective operation of the scheme : The proprietor is to borrow on the security of his land, say £10,000, at the rate of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. ; and to invest the same in certain American bonds professedly yielding 7 per cent., whereby a speculator would gain £250 a year. English gentlemen invited to borrow money on land in order to lend it to Americans ! Whoever heard anything to match this ?

Let it be plainly understood that whoever endeavours to obtain more than the usual rate of interest for money laid by, incurs a hazard. The investment may, perchance, be honestly planned, and the promised returns may be realised ; but there is always some doubt, and the benefit of this doubt by no means generally falls to the lot of the investor. Especially is caution needed when, as we have said, the money is to be sunk in some foreign enterprise, beyond the ken of any persons in this country except those who assist in bringing out the scheme.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

MANY illusions prevail with respect to the theatrical profession. None is more potent than as to how the actor passes the day. There is a certain class who credit him with nothing beyond drinking, smoking, lounging, sponging on his friends, or borrowing half-crowns ; and there are others who, on the contrary, conceive that his career is spent in ceaseless toil. These come nearer the truth. The profession of an actor involves the careful study of human character, passions, and feelings, with a view to represent them in mimic scenes of life on the stage. To perform his part with any chance of success, the actor necessarily undergoes an immense deal of training, both as regards study and rehearsals. It is scarcely too much to say that the success of a dramatic season, as well as the actor's fame, depends almost entirely on the arrangement, and the way in which rehearsals are conducted. A piece may be killed either from too little or too much care bestowed upon its rearing. As a general rule, pieces in the provinces are produced too hastily ; in some cases, in London the rehearsals are very

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numerous, but varying according to the nature and importance of the piece. The quiet little drawing-room drama of *Still Waters run Deep* occupied but three weeks, the spectacle of *Babil and Bijou* nearly four months. The rehearsals of *The Corsican Brothers*, when the piece was originally brought out at the Princess', had the same lengthy preparation. Wilkie Collins' recent adaptation of *Man and Wife* was read to the company in December, and not produced till the latter end of March following. The actors and actresses during the intervening period were engaged in rehearsing from ten o'clock in the morning till three or four in the afternoon, the majority of them having to appear on the stage again at half-past seven the same evening. Rather hard work this.

There is a strong desire in the public mind to see a rehearsal, which, were permission granted to be present, would be speedily dissipated. The charm of the novelty of witnessing a combat with the combatants in modern dress, and armed with walking-sticks; of enjoying the privilege of a *tête-à-tête* with Juliet in chignon, pannier, and gipsy hat; of hearing the clown arranging seriously with the stage-manager when and where the inevitable and inexhaustible baby shall be changed into a sucking-pig; or of watching the fairy queen ascend into the realms of Bliss, in a polonaise and hessians: the charm associated in the mind with all these delightful little episodes would at once be dissolved by a closer acquaintanceship with a rehearsal in detail. The order adhered to in the production of a play is usually as follows: The piece is first submitted by the author to the manager for approval. The manager, supposing he is not an actor himself, hands it to his stage-director, one of whose multifarious duties it is to read all such manuscripts approved of; and the time for its production having been agreed on, the stage-manager's business is then to cast the piece according to the members of the company's suitability and talent. On these points, there is scarcely one member of the company (excepting those who get good parts) who is not 'wronged,' 'slighted,' or 'insulted.' The stage-manager thus generally finds himself regarded in much the same light that an editor is who is compelled to write to an aspiring Byron that his contribution is 'unsuitable': he is looked upon as being, from personal feelings, diametrically opposed to rising talent and individual interests. So, for the whole of the rehearsals, and however long the piece may run afterwards, he finds himself scowled at, talked at, laughed at, sneered at, pouted and wept at, according as the exigencies of the case may demand, and the peculiarity of the 'outraged' may be. The 'line of character' may be recognised under a few heads. There is first what is termed Leading Business. This comprises all the heroes and heroines of tragedy, and in some principal comedies also. Then there is the Second or Juvenile Tragedian, who undertakes with this light comedy. He knows (or should know) what will fall to his share, in characters ranging from Macduff, Mercutio, and Charles Surface, to Brown in *The Weavers*. The Juvenile Lady is always expected to play the opposite parts. Then there is the First Heavies: the actor engaged for this line always anticipates the pleasure of playing all the villains, and anything but a gentleman. Everybody knows what the Low Comedian and First Old Man, First Old Woman

(who acts the Queen in *Hamlet*), do. Then comes the second scale of talent, under which head we have the First Walking Gentleman, who is a 'shadowy' light comedian; an individual who plays all those characters who have very much to say, and very little to do. Next come Second Heavies, which means gentlemen who expect to play Rosse in *Macbeth*, First Actor in *Hamlet*, the presiding Demon in the pantomime, and so forth. Then, again, Second Old Men; those individuals who are invariably murdered in dramas, or thrashed with a bladder in burlesque; Second Low Comedians; Chambermaids in silk gowns and fancy aprons; Walking Ladies, who have little to do beyond being married to somebody at the end of the piece; and Second Old Women, who are always either very virtuous, very shrewish, or suddenly hysterical, generally useful to the management, and often amusing from their antiquated airs. Then come a host of 'Utility' people; persons who deliver messages, and lead armies, and head riots, and do all the speaking parts in the comic scenes of a pantomime. Each of these, as we have said, know, according to precedent, what character he, or she, is expected to play. In any old piece, a former cast, found in the beginning of the play-book, is referred to, and so the matter is settled, for the actors know to a supernumerary what each actor in the old time was engaged for; but in a new piece, there are constant broils, bickerings, and expostulations, as: 'You've made a mistake, sir; this is not a light comedy part, sir; it's only a walking gentleman, sir.'—'This is a heavy; not a first old man, sir; &c.; to which remonstrance the stage-manager either turns a deaf ear, a conciliatory reply, or one to the effect that, if the 'aggrieved' does not choose to play the part assigned, he can at once leave the theatre. Hence, not unfrequently the public are amused with lawsuits connected with breach of theatrical engagements.

Suppose, then, the piece cast, the manuscript is put into the hands of the copyist of the theatre. This official is usually engaged at a yearly salary, and is subject to a fine of five pounds if, under any pretext, he parts with the manuscript prior to the first rehearsal. The copyist transcribes the manuscript, and then copies out the 'parts' of the respective characters. These parts contain also the cues, or two or three words to be uttered by the speaker whose speech precedes that of the character. No detail in connection with the stage business is named: the only reference to the latter is the monosyllable 'Bus.'

Meanwhile, the scenic artist is consulted as to new scenery, which, however, is sometimes prepared weeks before the company know that a new piece is projected. Parts being copied, stage-manager directs company to be summoned on a certain day and hour to hear the piece read in the green-room, by the author, manager, or stage-manager. 'All concerned' is the summons announced the night previous—'all concerned' embracing the meaning of stage-carpenters, musical director, scenic artist, property-man, prompter, wardrobe-keeper, the different actors and actresses who have been notified, and the call-boy. After the reading, supposing the piece to be of the nature of a spectacle, the stage-manager's time is occupied for some weeks in drilling the supernumeraries, arranging groupings; the ballet-

mistress making daily demands on the *corps de ballet* for the incidental dances, &c.; the orchestra meet in the music-room under the stage to rehearse the music; in fact, the hardest work is done long before the actors and actresses have anything to do with the rehearsals. But we will suppose now that the rehearsals of the dialogue begin. The first of these consists in each comparing parts with the manuscript of the piece; in the next, the various exits, entrances, situations, are arranged, and duly pencilled down by those personally interested in the scene. The first stone in the building of the piece is thus laid, and away go the company to work in real earnest. 'Clear the stage' is the signal for the business to commence. Fines varying from one shilling upwards are inflicted for any breach of discipline. Punctuality in attending these preliminary and, in fact, all meetings, is rigidly enforced. The clock in the green-room, where the company assemble, or the prompter's watch, decides any dispute on this point. The committing to memory of the exact words of the text of the manuscript is strictly enforced; and any substitution of the actor's words for those of the author, which is so frequently heard, and so constantly and justly complained of, in a small provincial theatre, is, in a first-class London one, unknown. There is a fine for being imperfect—half-a-crown for each scene; and one guinea, or dismissal, for substitution at night, or the introduction of what is termed 'gag.' That every care may be taken as to the exact words at rehearsal, there is even a fine inflicted for persons speaking too loudly when off the stage, in case of interrupting the speakers in the scene. As the piece advances, scenery and properties seem to grow into existence. For the first half-dozen rehearsals the stage is comparatively bare, separated from the back brick wall by only an old piece of painted canvas; gradually, however, the stage becomes the receptacle successively of house, gates, trees, waterfalls, fire-places, and new scenery; characteristic furniture takes the place of the faded and feeble old tables and broken chairs that have been used hitherto as substitutes. The attention to stage business and the exact words grows more and more minute. By degrees, the performers find their gestures limited, and toned down even to the movement of a limb and a turning of the eyeball. If the low comedian, in a supposition of tea, takes three bites of a slice of bread and butter, he is reminded that he must adhere to the original business, which was but two bites and a 'gulp.' Even the very steps of the actor come at length to be numbered, and a look, gasp, cough, or un-rehearsed movement of a muscle, is considered as sufficient to endanger the success of the piece.

A number of years ago, I was present at the rehearsal of a new tragedy at a fashionable west end London theatre. In addition to the services of an excellent stock company, the piece was to be supported by artistes of considerable note. On the stage—illuminated by only a gas-pipe, like a rake, with jets of gas for teeth, lighting up dingy scenes, bare walls, heavily daubed drapery, and making ceiling, pit, stalls, boxes, gallery, orchestra look very foggy, coarse, cold, gloomy, and wretched—at a small mahogany table, sat the prompter, with the manuscript, pens, ink, and papers before him. In his immediate vicinity, with their backs to the auditorium, and

their faces to the stage, were seated five gentlemen. One was the manager, another the stage-manager, a third the author, the remaining two were friends of the latter: they were Mr Westland Marston and Mr Charles Dickens. Despite the interest awakened by the novelty of the scene, and of being brought thus into the remotest possible connection with the unrivalled humorist, I found it of all pastimes that ever engaged me for five successive hours, one of the dreariest. To follow the action of the play, to have the slightest idea of what the scenes referred to, in what period the action of the piece was laid, or what one speech had to do with the succeeding, was a sheer impossibility. It was one series of interruptions from beginning to end. Everybody seemed to be talking, except the actors. There were endless consultations and detentions, a minute examination of every handkerchief, letter, table-cover, dagger, chalice, to say nothing of the scrutiny of every scene. The five reigning powers decided everything; and except in the case of the 'stars,' the individual judgment of the actor seemed all but ignored. Every exit, entrance, look, the raising of an arm, the bending of a knee, the inflection of a tone, the drawing of a sword, sitting down or rising, formed the subject of debate. I forgot how many times somebody died, and got up, and fought, and gasped, and staggered, and tumbled down again, and was finally told to do it as he had done it at first. I cannot call to mind the numberless disputes amongst the five stage-managers as to what should be done, or the difficulty there was, after something was decided on, in persuading some of the actors to do this, and not to do that: all that I can remember is, that it appeared in all cases very difficult to please or satisfy anybody concerned. The uninitiated may have some idea of the cost in producing a spectacle when I state that, during the late run of a piece at Covent Garden, in six months, with fairly filled houses, the loss amounted to thirty-five thousand pounds. This was, of course, an exceptional case. The piece, when launched, is usually called next morning for rehearsals, and trimmed, as to speeches, situations, and scenes. Then, if successful, the London actor has leisure for some six or nine months, during which recess, strange as it may seem to the uninitiated, he eats, drinks, rises, or sleeps, and goes to church like any other ordinary individual.

E V E N I N G.

THE sun is set, and up yon western steep
Wee clouds sail slow, now that the winds are curbed,
Seeming like scattered, scarcely moving sheep
On heavenly uplands grazing undisturbed.
Now birds their vespers with redoubled zeal
Hymn forth to Nature and to Nature's God;
And from some far-off fane a dreamy peal
Floats o'er the fields, by home-bound labourers trod.
Anon the first faint shades of eve have birth,
And grow and grow till darkness everywhere
Asserts its sway supreme. The glooming air
Is emptied soon of sound; and heaven with earth,
Down Night's great dome, right from the zenith's arc,
Seems holding mute communion in the dark.

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